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A Brief

Presented by

ONTARIO TEACHERS' FEDERATION

to the

ROYAL COMMISSION ON METROPOLITAN TORONTO

1964

That which concerns the education of one-third of a million Ontario children is the concern of all members of the teachers' professional organization. In this brief, therefore, we speak for all teachers in the province. Our purpose is to present the views of the Ontario Teachers' Federation relevant to the organization and administration of the education of children in the publicly-supported schools in the Greater Toronto Area.

It is not our intention to comment on any re-organization of the municipality of Metropolitan Toronto as it applies to such things as taxation or public works. Our concern is with the process of education - a subject on which we, as teachers, feel we can speak with some authority.

Education is unique among municipal services. In building a road we need not consider the individual differences of the people using the road; in setting up a water system, we do not need to consider the individual differences of the people using the water system; but in an educational system, it is most important that we consider the individual differences of the people using the system. The effects of changes made in an educational system cannot be assessed quickly and damage to a good system cannot easily be rectified. While we may assume that benefits in mechanical services may be measured by statistics, the educational process cannot be as easily measured.

Much has been said in support of an amalgamated educational system for Metropolitan Toronto. Proponents of this idea consistently point to the benefits of equal opportunity for all students. However, we can find no school system within the Metropolitan Area which has been cited as being inadequate. No evidence has been presented to show that students in one community are receiving an education superior or inferior to that provided for students in another community.

Dr. Frank MacKinnon, Principal of Prince of Wales College, Charlottetown, states in his book "The Politics of Education", "One must point also to a danger that tends to become concealed behind the attractiveness of the phrase 'equal opportunities'. Emphasis on 'equal opportunities' tends in practice to become insistence on 'the same opportunities' which is a different thing. Standardized curricula, courses, texts, methods, and requirements can ultimately produce the standardized thought, opinion, and habits that result in the man's mind which lives by man's propaganda."

We believe schools should have varying philosophies. Educational research has not determined the one definitive "best way of doing things". Diversity in educational thought and procedure is one of our greatest riches. Local education authorities have used their freedom to select from alternative courses of educational action wisely and with proud results. After consideration, each has instituted practices suitable to the school population under its jurisdiction.

In the smaller units of school administration, policies may be amended, services initiated and reforms instituted in a manner and with a speed impossible under a school board dealing with one-third of a million pupils. The city of Toronto has undertaken research and initiated experimental situations in enrichment programmes and in the Island Outdoor Science School which can cope with the group for whom they were proposed, but certainly not for thrice the number. A more conservative and cautious approach would have long delayed such plans in which Toronto can take such justifiable pride.

The healthy competition in school projects presently existing among school boards in the Metropolitan Area encourages boards to make improvements in facilities and in educational programmes. If this competition were removed, so too would be the impetus to experiment, to develop new ideas, and to initiate changes.

Disadvantages of a Large Centralized System

- (1) We have already mentioned the tendency of "equal opportunity" to become "the same opportunity". Such uniformity in education is not only unnecessary, it is undesirable.
 - (a) Uniformity leaves no flexibility for local needs, for local desires, for local ambition, for local ingenuity. "The centralized system assumes control virtually over all aspects of education Bureaucracy omits no detail, so that when the teacher confronts the pupil in a classroom, sometimes decorated and adorned according to regulations, he becomes practically the mouthpiece of the central authority, a skilled craftsman very frequently but hewing to the line. Now the question which at once arises is whether this is education or propaganda; whether such a system does not destroy the character of the school as a human institution and of instruction as the impact of mind upon mind." (I.L. Kendall "Comparative Education" quoted in "Report of the Royal Commission on Education in Ontario".)
 - (b) In one centralized system the overall standard tends to be not the highest level possible but the level more easily attained. A centralized and uniform educational system, therefore, can be expected to accept mediocrity as its standard. Dr. MacKinnon states "Inevitably it is the weaker schools and teachers that determine the requirements when all follow the same programmes. The trend of standards is, therefore, downward".

- (2) When considering the proposed amalgamation of the Metropolitan school boards, we must keep in mind that we are not considering only a uniform Metropolitan system, which is serious enough in itself, but a system which could very easily influence and even determine the educational practices throughout the province, since it would incorporate one-third of the students, teachers and schools in the province of Ontario.
 - (a) Standard textbooks for such a system would cause publishers to hesitate to print a textbook not approved by a system representing one-third of the students of the province. Metro-approved textbooks would, therefore, become the chief books available to the other Ontario school boards. A similar situation might well develop for other school supplies and equipment.
 - (b) A uniform Metropolitan salary scale might very quickly lead to a uniform provincial scale, and the result would be a form of Burnham scale which has led to such difficulty in England.
 - (c) The Director and other officials of such a large system would have as much or more influence on the curriculum of the province than would the Minister of Education.
- (3) A radical change would take place in the relationship of the trustee to the schools and the community. A mammoth Metropolitan system would place the trustee in a remote position and the following effects would be evident.
 - (a) The voters would no longer be familiar with the candidates, and this encourages an apathetic attitude on the part of the community in regard to education. "The basic difficulty with extremely large schools systems -- those cities and counties with more than 100,000 total population -- is the atrophy of public participation and interest in educational affairs. The active citizen involvement in school matters that characterizes small and moderate-sized districts appears to be lacking in great metropolitan centres." (J. Eastmond of the Brigham Young University, St. Provo, Utah, "The Teacher and School Administration" 1959)
 - (b) Trustees themselves could no longer be so familiar with the local problems, and reforms would be made only after long delay, if at all. Under the present system, attention is given to the individual needs of a smaller community. Let us give a few examples. Through the pressure of parents, the North York School Board included a ravine

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(b)

Trustees themselves could no longer be so familiar with the local problems, and reforms would be made only after long delay. If at all. Indeed the present system, attention is given to the individual needs of a smaller community. Let us give a few examples. Through the pressure of parents, the North York School Board included a training

in the property of the Three Valleys School which is used in the study of natural science. Specialized programmes to encourage the individual capabilities of gifted children are the pride of school units such as Etobicoke, Forest Hill and East York. Such "local" action and advancement could not be accomplished with the same speed under a centralized system, if it were achieved at all. It is stated by the National Advisory Committee on Education "Federal Relations in Education" (as quoted in the Report of the Royal Commission on Education in Ontario), "... harm results when intimacy between schools and their patrons and neighbours is disturbed by remote control of a distant authority".

- (4) The Federation is naturally concerned with the effect of centralization upon teacher morale. Where centralization has taken place, the responsibility of making decisions about education has been so far removed from the teacher as to make him but a part of a mechanical process. The problem of delay both in formulating and carrying out plans and policies discourages interest by the teachers and citizens. Possible improvement in terms of a year or two becomes impractical in a system like London, England, where it may take four to ten years to effect even a simple change. Under such a system, teachers with initiative would soon become stifled and apathetic, as they are said to be in London and New York. We have with us a teacher shortage that extends into the foreseeable future. To establish a centralized system that restricts the creative and independent mind would discourage the entry of such minds into the profession. This would inevitably lead to a lowering of professional status and of standards, and would do nothing to alleviate the shortage of well-educated teachers.
- (5) If a single board of education were to be established with authority over the entire area of Metropolitan Toronto, such a board and its senior officials would rival in influence the Minister of Education and his Department.
- (6) The administration of such a large system would create a problem of communication. Information would be obtained by written report rather than by personal contact. Rule by report would, therefore, eventually become the accepted procedure.

Dr. Frederick L. Redifer, Professor of Higher Education, School of Education, New York University, has this to say in an article "The School Board and Teacher Morale" in "The American School Board Journal", July, 1962: "... studies in New York city indicated that poor relations existed between the staff and the board of education. Communications were

exceptionally faulty..... When a board adopts a policy affecting teachers and this policy is transmitted to them via the superintendent and then it is transmitted via the principals, all kinds of distortions may occur so that teachers get a totally wrong impression of what the board thought it was doing." Boards of a very large educational system lose contact with classroom conditions quickly and must rely on reports made by sub-officials who may not be vitally concerned with results, as the teacher and pupils are.

- (7) Centralization in Chicago, New York and Philadelphia has resulted in a well-documented neglect of pupils, teachers and schools in downtown areas, with the result that teachers are reluctant to be assigned to such schools. The larger cities in the United States and in England (London) are seeking to decentralize their large school systems because these have, in their opinion, led to serious problems and to inferior education services, particularly in the poorer sections. The Report of the Royal Commission on Education in Ontario states that in Australia and New Zealand "There has been a realization of the danger to democracy of a highly centralized system and considerable decentralization has been recommended".

Comments

The case for amalgamation as given in "The Case for Equalization of Educational Opportunity in Metropolitan Toronto" and other statements supporting amalgamation are based chiefly on financial consideration. While the idea of "equality of education" is frequently expounded, this is always equated as equality of expenditure. In the Toronto Metropolitan Area we can find no evidence that a greater expenditure of money has, ipso facto, resulted in better education. At no time has any philosophical basis been given for amalgamation or any proof adduced that amalgamation would lead to better teaching and better education.

Increased efficiency is also given as a reason for amalgamation. An increase in efficiency is a strong argument for any cause and is desirable at an administrative level. The Federation however doubts that an increase in administrative efficiency would take place as a result of amalgamation. Efficiency tends to decrease rather than increase when an administration expands beyond a size adequate for its purpose. In any event, what has not been clarified is how an increase in administrative efficiency, if this could be achieved, would help the pupil or the classroom teacher.

The individual municipalities have found that in several specific areas the education of atypical children such as in the Metropolitan School for the Deaf, and Sunnyview School for the

physically handicapped, can be provided by a voluntary pooling of youngsters and financial resources.

Dr. Albert Rose in his article "The Case Against Total Amalgamation in Metropolitan Toronto" gives philosophical support to our thesis in the following statement he makes with regard to amalgamation generally. "The real challenge in a modern metropolitan area like Toronto is the provision of a whole urban environment that is a good environment, and the chance for people to choose among several different types of conditions and influences. This means that we must develop political institutions which will promote and protect diversity. Do we want this kind of diversity? If we do, we must decide clearly which public services need to be uniform and which may be left to the administration of a meaningful and viable local government. We need to encourage local interest, local initiative and local participation.

"The challenge does not lie in the creation of a vast city of more than two million persons by 1970 and nearly three millions by 1980. The challenge lies in the strengthening of local government in moderate-sized units. The present seven small municipalities with 20,000 population or less, can maintain their identity as neighbourhoods or electoral districts within the new boroughs or cities."

In his "Growing up Absurd", dealing with the problems of modern society and modern education, Paul Goodman has this to say: "It must be understood that with the increase in population and crowding, the number and variety of human services increase disproportionately and the laissez-faire areas, both geographical and social, decrease. Therefore, the units of human service, such as school classes or the clientele of a physician (and even political district) ought to be made smaller to avoid the creation of masses; mass teaching, mass medicine, mass psycho therapy, mass penology, mass politics."

Informed opinion suggests that the best type of education may be offered in systems large enough to provide continuity of education from kindergarten to secondary school graduation, with various types of education at the secondary school level, but not so large that flexibility of action and community interest are lost. It would appear that systems that vary in size from 3,000 to 75,000 students come within this range.

In conclusion, the Federation is in favour of a system whereby trustees are elected by a cohesive community. Such trustees are familiar with the entire area for which they are responsible and will give attention to individual needs. Local areas retain their unique individuality, so that a school tradition is maintained by the pupils, teachers, trustees and ratepayers.

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public, teachers, students and taxpayers.

The Federation is in favour of retaining the status quo in Metropolitan Toronto as regards educational units, with some further equalization of finances over the area and of co-operation in special areas of education. Failing this, we would favour a borough system with boroughs of varying sizes to accommodate the different communities within the area. As suggested previously, these boroughs should probably not have fewer than 3,000 students or more than 75,000. In such a system, it might be well if a means could be found to divide the City of Toronto system into two parts.

Education is an important instrument in political and economic development. The desperate emphasis placed by developing countries on education is evidence that they are aware of this importance. We fear that sacrificing educational excellence in order to obtain financial equality in an area comprising such a large portion of our population will stultify our intellectual growth and thereby arrest the economic and political development of the Metropolitan area and possibly of the province.

March 16, 1964

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Education is an important instrument in political and economic development. The character of a place is shaped by developing economic or education is evidence that they are aware of this important role. We have been successful educational excellence in order to obtain financial results in an area comprising such a large portion of our population who still are intellectual growth and healthy areas. The economic and political development of the Metropolitan area and possibly of the province.

March 12, 1964
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